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AUTHOR Kendall, Kathleen E.
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ABSTRACT

A communication audit was conducted to diagnose and evaluate communication in a New York school district and to make general suggestions for improving communication. Based on pilot interviews of district and school staff and the general public, and on material from a Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools, a mail survey was constructed and completed by 274 selected residents of the school district. The results, more favorable than those of national surveys, indicated that most community members and teachers and staff rated the school district highly for its over-all quality of education. Respondents rated the ability to read, speak, and write English correctly and the development of good study and work habits most highly. Parents were more knowledgeable and more positive about the schools than were respondents without children. Five of the eight most used and trusted communication sources were associated with individual schools: notices sent home with children, school newsletters, teachers, school children, and parents of school children. Based on the audit results, it was recommended that (1) the district concentrate its energies more on a few communication sources including the district newsletter, (2) teachers play a more active part in interpersonal communication in the community, and (3) the school board provide district residents with opportunities to communicate with board members. (Highlights from each chapter of the audit's final report are included.) (HTH)

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CONDUCTING THE COMMUNITY AUDIT: DESIGN AND RESULTS

by

Kathleen E. Kendall
Department of Communication, BA 113
State University of New York at Albany
Albany, New York 12222

Telephone: 518-442-4870

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CONDUCTING THE COMMUNITY AUDIT: DESIGN AND RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY from original report of October, 1985: "TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION IN THE NISKAYUNA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: A COMMUNICATION AUDIT"

The purpose of this report is to describe a communication audit designed to diagnose and evaluate communication in the Niskayuna Central School District and to make general suggestions for improving communication. The district has an adult population of 15,200 of whom one-third presently have children in the public schools. The district employs about 250 certificated staff members and 150 support staff. The schools have won much attention for the number of National Merit Scholars and other measures of excellence. Local media include the Schenectady Gazette, Knickerbocker News and Times Union, seven radio stations, and three television stations which carry local news. The district's own media include a newsletter (Your Schools), Continuing Education brochures, individual school newsletters, and a high school newspaper (The Warrior). The average income and educational level of Niskayuna residents are much above the national or regional average.

The audit was commissioned by the Superintendent and Board of Education as a way of getting community feedback on the communication, goals and priorities of the district schools at a time when several school budgets had been voted down. Through such a broad and objective study, the district's planners hoped to get a better sense of the perceptions and priorities of the taxpayers, as well as examining the views of teachers and staff in the internal organization. The researchers in the audit were faculty members and graduate students from the State University of New York at Albany, from the Department of Communication and the Evaluation Consortium of the School of Education.

The study employed face-to-face and telephone interviews in its initial stage. Interviews were conducted with the staff of the district office, all Board members, all principals, thirteen community leaders, a random sample of teachers and staff, and a random sample of the general public, a total of fifty-three people in all.

Based on the concerns and interests expressed in these interviews, as well as material from the Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Towards Public Schools, the researchers constructed a mail survey which was sent to eight hundred twenty randomly selected residents of the school district. Two hundred seventy-four usable surveys were returned, or one-third of the total. The response rate was sufficient to generalize to the entire population of Niskayuna at a confidence level of $\pm$ 3%. However, since two-thirds of the respondents have children in the schools (while two-thirds of the actual population do not have children in the schools), the statistical significance for the group without children in the schools is not as reliable as for those with children in school and the general public. A similar survey was sent to all members of the teachers and staff; they returned 129, or 23% of the surveys. Teacher response was 40%.

The results of the audit indicated that most community members and teachers and staff rated the school district highly for the over-all quality of education it provides, giving grades in the A and B range. Less than 1% gave the schools an unfavorable rating. When the Niskayuna survey is compared to the surveys administered nationally and in the Capital District, the evaluations in Niskayuna are much higher. Ninety percent of Niskayuna residents give A/B ratings to their schools, while sixty-four percent of the respondents in the Capital District and forty-two percent of the respondents nationally rate their schools so highly.

When asked to indicate which objectives are most important in the schools, respondents rated "ability to read, speak, and write English correctly" and "development of good study and work habits" most highly. Of all the objectives they considered important, respondents generally agreed that the schools needed to give more attention to study and work habits than they do at present.

The researchers compared the responses from parents and people without children in the schools, people who voted for and against the school budget, and voters and non-voters on the school budget. There are significant differences between each of these groups. The parents are the most knowledgeable about the schools and the most positive

about the schools; people without children in the schools are less knowledgeable and less positive. A high percent of the latter group are older than the parents; over half have children who have graduated from Niskayuna High School. Those who voted against the school budget are more critical than the other groups about the way the district spends its money. When comparing the voters and non-voters, we see that the voters are generally parents who are actively involved in the schools; the majority of non-voters are parents too, but they are the inactive parents, less knowledgeable and less likely to go to school meetings or functions, but more positive about the schools than the negative voter.

The researchers also examined the district's communication sources, measuring the community's amount of contact with twenty sources, the amount of information they got from them, and their credibility. From this comparison eight communication sources emerged as the most used and trusted in the community, and five of these are associated with the individual schools: notices sent home with children, individual school newsletters, teachers, school children, and parents of school children. The other three are the district newsletters, Your Schools, Continuing Education brochures, and the Schenectady Gazette.

As a result of these findings, we recommend that the district concentrate its energies more on a few communication sources, particularly those in the individual schools, in a grassroots communication strategy. Perhaps the district's communication specialist could help to advise the newsletter editors, and the newsletters could be published more frequently. The newsletter editors might be included in important district meetings so as to be better informed. The newsletters could be distributed more widely in the neighborhoods on a trial basis, reaching people without children, many of them senior citizens, and parents of pre-school children. A newsletter column on "News of Neighbors and Alumni of _____ School" would not be inappropriate, considering the importance of those groups to the school's history and the lives of the children. Columns

from the newsletters could be reprinted in Your Schools to reach a wider audience, and important district news could be published in the newsletters.

The community survey showed that the teachers are perceived as vital information sources in the school, well informed, credible, and in contact with more than two-thirds of the respondents. They could play an important role in the grassroots communication of the respondents. They could play an important role in the grassroots communication strategy, particularly if they could be relieved somewhat of the large volume of written reports required in the system. The teachers could take a more active part in interpersonal communication with the community, particularly with the inactive parents. A friendly telephone call from your child's teacher is the epitome of responsiveness, and the words "responsive" and "caring" were two of the most frequently mentioned words in the community's description of the ideal school system. An alternative method of reaching the inactive parent is through the print media, particularly the individual school newsletter.

A final recommendation concerns the Board's communication with the community. Many good suggestions were made for ways the Board could listen to the community, such as having a suggestion box at the Town Hall when people pay their school taxes, and having a section of Your Schools for the community to fill in and send to the Board. This communication audit gave people the opportunity to tell the Board and administrators what they thought. The audit is an important symbol that the leaders of the schools are open-minded and willing to listen, that they welcome two-way communication, not just one-way communication. And that symbolism should be nurtured in the future.

ATTACHED ARE HIGHLIGHTS FROM EACH CHAPTER OF THE REPORT:

CHAPTER I. GOALS AND METHODS

IN JANUARY, 1985, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE NISKAYUNA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT CONTACTED DR. KATHLEEN E. KENDALL, CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AT SUNY-ALBANY. THEY WERE INTERESTED IN GETTING PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

CHAPTER I. GOALS AND METHODS - (Continued)

ON WAYS TO IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PEOPLE OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. DR. KENDALL AND HER RESEARCH TEAM CARRIED OUT A "COMMUNICATION AUDIT" TO IDENTIFY THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF DISTRICT COMMUNICATION AND TO AID IN FUTURE PLANNING.

THE BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT SAW THIS STUDY AS POTENTIALLY THE FIRST IN A REGULAR EVALUATIVE PROCESS TO TAKE PLACE PERIODICALLY TO ENSURE THAT THEY RECEIVED ACCURATE FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY ON THEIR GOVERNANCE OF THE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE SCHOOLS.

THE COMMUNICATION AUDIT CONTAINED TWO MAIN STAGES. IN THE FIRST STAGE, IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH, 1985, THE SUNY-ALBANY RESEARCH TEAM CONDUCTED 53 PERSONAL AND TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, ADMINISTRATORS AND SECRETARIES IN THE SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE, PRINCIPALS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, A RANDOM SAMPLE OF TEACHERS AND STAFF, AND A RANDOM SAMPLE OF ADULTS IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. IN THE SECOND STAGE, ON MAY 10, 1985, SURVEYS WERE MAILED TO A RANDOM SAMPLE OF 820 DISTRICT RESIDENTS AND DISTRIBUTED TO ALL THE DISTRICT TEACHERS AND STAFF CONCERNING THEIR VIEWS ABOUT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.

IN ORDER TO GENERALIZE TO THE ADULT POPULATION OF NISKAYUNA (15,000) AT A $\pm$ 3% LEVEL, THE RESEARCHERS SOUGHT A RETURN OF AT LEAST 201 SURVEYS, A[illegible]. THAT NUMBER WAS EXCEEDED IN THE 274 SURVEYS RETURNED. IN ORDER TO GENERALIZE AT A $\pm$ 3% LEVEL ABOUT TWO SPECIFIC GROUPS, PARENTS AND PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS, THEY NEEDED A RETURN OF 394

CHAPTER I: GOALS AND METHODS - (Continued)

SURVEYS (195 PARENTS, AND 199 PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS). THESE NUMBERS WERE NOT ACHIEVED, ALTHOUGH THE RETURN OF SURVEYS FROM PARENTS (181) CAME VERY CLOSE TO THE 195 SOUGHT.

OF THE 129 SURVEYS RETURNED BY TEACHERS AND STAFF, 101 WERE FROM TEACHERS, REPRESENTING 40% OF ALL NISKAYUNA TEACHERS.

THE RESEARCHERS EXAMINED THE SURVEY RESULTS BY USING THE STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (SPSS), AND BY DOING A COMPUTERIZED CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION.

CERTAIN KEY QUESTIONS WERE ANALYZED THROUGH CROSS TABULATION, AND CHI SQUARE SCORES WERE DERIVED TO DETERMINE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIFFERENCES.

CHAPTER II: A COMPARISON OF RATINGS WITH LOCAL AND NATIONAL SURVEYS

THIS SECTION SUMMARIZES THE GRADING NISKAYUNA RESIDENTS GIVE THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMPARES THOSE FINDINGS WITH SIMILAR CAPITAL DISTRICT AND NATIONAL SURVEYS OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION.

THE RESPONDENTS IN THIS SURVEY ARE OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE ABOUT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION THAT IS PROVIDED IN THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOLS. NINE OUT OF TEN RESPONDENTS GRADE THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOLS WITH "A" OR "B" GRADE WHILE LESS THAN ONE PERCENT GIVE THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AN UNFAVORABLE GRADE ("D").

ALMOST 95% OF THE NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS RATE THE CURRICULUM FAVORABLY (A/B), WITH THE REMAINDER (6%) ALLOTTING A C/D RATING.

CHAPTER II: A COMPARISON OF RATINGS WITH LOCAL AND NATIONAL SURVEYS - (Continued)

THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS SHOW CONFIDENCE IN THE QUALITY OF TEACHING PROVIDED BY NISKAYUNA TEACHERS. APPROXIMATELY 85% OF THE RESPONDENTS AWARD AN A/B GRADE TO TEACHING.

THREE OUT OF FOUR NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT THE EDUCATION STUDENTS RECEIVE IS OF A/B QUALITY, WITH ONLY 12% RATING IT A "C" AND UNDER 2% RATING IT A "D".

APPROXIMATELY 62% OF THE NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS GIVE SCHOOLS AN "A" OR "B" FOR THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENT CONDUCT. THE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN GIVE MORE FAVORABLE RATINGS (66% A/B) IN THIS AREA. ONLY 46% OF PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS GIVE THE SCHOOLS A/B RATINGS ON THIS QUESTION.

IN THE NISKAYUNA SURVEY, A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS (28% ON THE GIFTED PROGRAM AND 52% ON THE HANDICAPPED PROGRAM) INDICATE THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION TO RATE THESE PROGRAMS. APPROXIMATELY NINE IN TEN NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS WHO DO RATE THE GIFTED PROGRAM GAVE IT AN "A" OR "B" RATING. OF THOSE WHO DID RATE THE HANDICAPPED PROGRAM, THE EVALUATIONS WERE GENERALLY FAVORABLE, ABOVE THOSE IN THE CAPITAL DISTRICT.

APPROXIMATELY 60% OF THE NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS GIVE AN "A" OR "B" RATING TO THE EDUCATION OF THE AVERAGE CHILD. WHILE THE EVALUATION IS DECIDEDLY FAVORABLE, IT IS MUCH LOWER (BY ALMOST 30%) THAN THE RATING GIVEN THE GIFTED PROGRAM.

SCHOOL RESPONSIVENESS TO PARENT INQUIRIES IS A CRUCIAL ASPECT OF QUALITY EDUCATION. THE RESPONDENTS OF THIS SURVEY RATE THIS AREA

CHAPTER II: A COMPARISON OF RATINGS WITH LOCAL AND NATIONAL SURVEYS - (Continued)

POSITIVELY, WITH ABOUT THREE OUT OF FOUR RESPONDENTS (77%) GIVING A GRADE OF "A" OR "B."

NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS SHOW CONFIDENCE IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS, AS ALMOST THREE OUT OF FOUR RESPONDENTS (74%) RATE THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AS "A" OR "B."

AS RESPONDENTS EXAMINED THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL BOARD POLICY-MAKING, OVER HALF (58%) OF THE NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS RATED THIS AREA AN "A" OR "B." A SIZABLE MINORITY (28%) GAVE THE BOARD AN AVERAGE RATING.

OVERALL, THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOL DISTRICT RECEIVES POSITIVE RATINGS, RESPONDENTS APPEAR TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESENT SYSTEM. ON EVERY POINT COMPARED WITH THE CAPITAL DISTRICT AND NATIONAL GALLUP FINDINGS THE NISKAYUNA RESPONDENTS EVALUATE THEIR SCHOOLS MORE FAVORABLY.

IF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS ARE TYPICAL OF NISKAYUNA RESIDENTS GENERALLY, THEY HAVE EXTREMELY HIGH GOALS FOR THEIR SCHOOLS. OVER HALF THE RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT ALL THE 23 OBJECTIVES LISTED IN THE SURVEY ARE "VERY IMPORTANT" OR OF "ABOVE AVERAGE" IMPORTANCE.

CHAPTER III: COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT: PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE VOTERS ON THE SCHOOL BUDGET, AND VOTERS AND NON-VOTERS.

PEOPLE WITH CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS KNOW A GREAT DEAL MORE ABOUT THE SCHOOLS THAN THE OTHERS SURVEYED. WHILE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN USE MULTIPLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOLS, THE PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN ENROLLED USE FEW. WHILE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

FIND MANY SOURCES CREDIBLE, THE OTHERS DO NOT USE MANY SOURCES AND DO NOT FIND MANY CREDIBLE. ON ONE-FOURTH OF THE QUESTIONS ON THE SURVEY, AT LEAST ONE-THIRD OF THE RESPONDENTS ANSWERED "DON'T KNOW" OR "NO CONTACT." THOSE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SYSTEM WERE MOST LIKELY TO ANSWER THIS WAY.

THE MOST CREDIBLE COMMUNICATION SOURCES WITH THE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN WERE NOTICES SENT HOME WITH CHILDREN, INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTER, THE WARRIOR (ALTHOUGH FEWER THAN HALF HAD ANY CONTACT WITH IT), CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES, YOUR SCHOOLS, PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN, SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND GUIDANCE COUNSELORS (ALTHOUGH ONE-THIRD HAD NO CONTACT). FOR EACH OF THESE SOURCES, OVER 50% OF THE PARENTS FOUND THE SOURCE'S CREDIBILITY EXCELLENT OR GOOD.

THE ONLY SOURCES OF COMMUNICATION WHICH OVER HALF THE PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS BOTH HAD CONTACT WITH AND FOUND EXCELLENT OR GOOD IN CREDIBILITY WERE THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES, YOUR SCHOOLS, THE SCHENECTADY GAZETTE, AND PARENTS WITH SCHOOL CHILDREN.

PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO VOTE THAN THOSE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS.

NOT ONLY ARE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN MORE LIKELY TO VOTE, BUT THEY ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO VOTE YES ON THE SCHOOL BUDGET THAN PEOPLE WITH CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN HAVE LIVED IN THE DISTRICT A SHORTER TIME, ARE MORE LIKELY TO

CHAPTER III: COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT - (Con't.)

LIVE IN THE CRAIG AND GLENCLIFF SCHOOL AREAS THAN THE OTHERS, ARE YOUNGER, HAVE SLIGHTLY MORE EDUCATION, HAVE HIGHER INCOMES, AND ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE CHILDREN WHO GRADUATED FROM NISKAYUNA HIGH SCHOOL THAN THE OTHERS. THOSE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS TEND TO BE LONG-TIME NISKAYUNA RESIDENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO GRADUATED FROM NISKAYUNA HIGH SCHOOL (55%). THEY ARE SIGNIFICANTLY OLDER THAN THE OTHER GROUP, ARE CLUSTERED IN THE ROSENDALE AND HILLSIDE SCHOOL AREAS, AND HAVE SLIGHTLY LESS EDUCATION AND LESS INCOME.

THE PROPORTION OF NEGATIVE VOTES REPORTED IN THE SURVEY IS MUCH LOWER THAN THOSE IN THE ACTUAL BUDGET VOTE. THIS CAN BE EXPLAINED IN PART BY THE FACT THAT ONLY ONE-THIRD OF THE SURVEYS RETURNED WERE FROM PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS, AND IT IS THIS GROUP WHICH TENDS TO VOTE MOST NEGATIVELY ON THE SCHOOL BUDGET. WE CAN ALSO SPECULATE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO FELT MOST POSITIVELY ABOUT THE SCHOOLS, I.E., THE PEOPLE WHO VOTED YES ON THE BUDGET, WERE MORE LIKELY TO RETURN THEIR SURVEYS, AS A GESTURE OF SUPPORT FOR THE SCHOOLS.

THE MAIN REASON FOR THE NEGATIVE VOTES CENTERS ON THE PERCEPTION OF DISTRICT FINANCES.

ONLY THE SCHENECTADY GAZETTE AND THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES ARE SOURCES WHICH NEGATIVE VOTERS HAVE REGULAR CONTACT WITH AND FIND CREDIBLE, WHILE THE POSITIVE VOTERS HAVE REGULAR CONTACT WITH MANY COMMUNICATION SOURCES AND FIND THEM CREDIBLE.

A SLIGHT MAJORITY OF THE NON-VOTERS IN THIS SURVEY HAVE CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS, (53% DO, 47% DON'T), BUT THEY ARE LESS ACTIVELY INVOLVED

CHAPTER III: COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT - (Con't.)

WITH THE SCHOOLS THAN THE VOTERS, AND THEY KNOW LESS ABOUT THE SCHOOLS. THE NON-VOTERS GAVE AS THEIR MAIN REASON FOR NOT VOTING THAT THEY WERE OUT OF TOWN (27%), DID NOT HAVE TIME (25%), HAD OTHER REASONS FOR NOT VOTING (22%), OR WERE BASICALLY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOLS (20%). IN CONTRAST TO THE NEGATIVE VOTER THEY SEEM MORE DISINTERESTED THAN HOSTILE IN THEIR RESPONSE TO THE SCHOOLS. AS IN STUDIES OF NON-VOTERS IN OTHER ELECTIONS, THE NON-VOTERS IN THE SCHOOL BUDGET ELECTION SEEM TO BE LESS INFORMED AND LESS INTERESTED THAN THE VOTERS.

THE VOTERS IDENTIFIED MORE CLOSELY WITH THE SCHOOLS THAN THE NON-VOTERS: THEY WERE MORE LIKELY TO BE SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOLS, TO SPEAK POSITIVELY ABOUT THE SCHOOLS, AND TO SAY THAT THEIR EDUCATIONAL VALUES WERE SIMILAR TO THE SCHOOLS.

CHAPTER IV: THE BEST COMMUNICATION SOURCES FOR THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOLS AND WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE SCHOOLS

LOOKING AT THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS AS A WHOLE, WE SEE THAT OF THE 20 COMMUNICATION SOURCES STUDIED, ONLY EIGHT REACH AT LEAST TWO-THIRDS OF THEM. THESE EIGHT SOURCES ARE: NOTICES SENT HOME WITH CHILDREN, INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS, YOUR SCHOOLS, SCHOOL CHILDREN, PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN, TEACHERS, SCHENECTADY GAZETTE, AND CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES.

THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS ARE PERCEIVED AS THE BEST SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOLS BOTH IN QUANTITY AND CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION, THROUGH NOTICES SENT HOME, INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL CHILDREN. THE DISTRICT'S PUBLICATIONS, ESPECIALLY THE NEWSLETTER YOUR SCHOOLS AND THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES,

CHAPTER IV: THE BEST COMMUNICATION SOURCES FOR THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOLS - (Continued)

ARE ALSO WIDELY READ AND TRUSTED SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOLS. FINALLY, THE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THE MAIN NEWSPAPER OF THE AREA, THE SCHENECTADY GAZETTE, ARE RATED AS IMPORTANT SOURCES OF INFORMATION IN BOTH QUANTITY AND CREDIBILITY.

THE ABOVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNITY'S PREFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION SOURCES APPLIES MAINLY TO THE PARENTS. THE ONLY MEDIA WHICH OVER HALF THE PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS BOTH HAVE CONTACT WITH AND FIND EXCELLENT OR GOOD IN CREDIBILITY ARE THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES, YOUR SCHOOLS, THE SCHENECTADY GAZETTE, AND PARENTS WITH SCHOOL CHILDREN.

SHOULD THE SCHOOL DISTRICT WISH TO REACH THE PEOPLE WHO VOTED AGAINST THE BUDGET IN MAY, 1985, THE BEST SOURCE WOULD BE THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES. THEY ALSO READ YOUR SCHOOLS AND THE SCHENECTADY GAZETTE REGULARLY, BUT RATE THEM ONLY AVERAGE IN CREDIBILITY.

IF THE SCHOOLS WANT TO CONTACT THE VOTERS, THEY COULD USE THE SAME CHANNELS APPROPRIATE FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC, PLUS OTHER PEOPLE IN THE SCHOOLS AND MEETINGS. THOSE PEOPLE WHO GAIN INFORMATION AT MEETINGS, MAY SERVE AS OPINION LEADERS IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND IDEAS TO OTHERS.

REACHING THE NON-VOTER CAN BE DONE IN BASICALLY THE SAME WAY YOU REACH THE GENERAL PUBLIC, THROUGH THE MAJOR COMMUNICATION SOURCES.

IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT MANY OF THE COMMUNICATION SOURCES STUDIES IN THE COMMUNICATION AUDIT HAVE NOT BEEN DISCUSSED HERE, THEY UNDOUBTEDLY SERVE AS IMPORTANT INFORMATION SOURCES FOR MANY NISKAYUNA RESIDENTS.

CHAPTER IV: THE BEST COMMUNICATION SOURCES FOR THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOLS - (Continued)

THIS SURVEY ASKED RESPONDENTS TO INDICATE HOW MUCH INFORMATION THEY WANTED THE SCHOOLS TO GIVE THEM ON NINE TOPICS. OVER HALF THE RESPONDENTS WANT "A GREAT DEAL" OR AN "ABOVE AVERAGE" AMOUNT OF INFORMATION ON ALL THE TOPICS. THE MAJORITY OF NISKAYUNA RESIDENTS ARE VORACIOUS IN THEIR DESIRE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOLS.

CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION IN THE DISTRICT

THE FACT THAT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT REQUESTED THIS COMMUNICATION AUDIT IN THE FIRST PLACE IS A HEALTHY SIGH; IT TAKES A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SELF-CONFIDENCE FOR AN ORGANIZATION TO EXPOSE ITSELF TO SUCH CLOSE SCRUTINY. IN MOST AREAS THE RESEARCH TEAM SIMPLY ADVISES, "KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK." WE DO HAVE SEVERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION IN THE DISTRICT.

THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS THE HUB OF THE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IN THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOL DISTRICT. THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTER IS A KEY COMPONENT IN THIS SYSTEM.

TEACHERS EMERGE AS THE MOST CREDIBLE COMMUNICATION SOURCE IN THE SCHOOLS FOR THE COMMUNITY; THEY DESERVE SPECIAL PRAISE FOR THEIR EFFORTS AT COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS, THEIR NOTICES SENT HOME WITH CHILDREN AND THEIR INFORMAL COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN AND PARENTS.

TWO DISTRICT-WIDE TYPES OF PUBLICATION ALSO EMERGE AS KEY INFORMATION SOURCES: YOUR SCHOOLS AND THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES. WE SUGGEST THAT YOUR SCHOOLS REPRINT ARTICLES OF SPECIAL INTEREST FROM THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS, AND THAT THE NEWSLETTERS PUBLICIZE IMPORTANT DISTRICT NEWS.

CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION IN THE DISTRICT - (Continued)

MORE DISTRICT NEWS MIGHT BE DISSEMINATED THROUGH THE CONTINUING EDUCATION BROCHURES.

IF INCREASING SUPPORT FOR THE SCHOOLS IS A DISTRICT GOAL, WE RECOMMEND THAT THE INACTIVE PARENT BE THE CHIEF TARGET, AND THAT THE BEST STRATEGY OF COMMUNICATION TO ADOPT IS TO WORK THROUGH THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL AND TEACHER.

IN THE COMMUNITY'S DESCRIPTION OF THE IDEAL SCHOOL SYSTEM, TWO OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED ADJECTIVES WERE "RESPONSIVE" AND "CARING." AND THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED PEOPLE WERE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS. FREEING TEACHERS FOR MORE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS SHOULD HELP TO MOVE THE SCHOOLS EVEN CLOSER TO THE IDEALS AND VALUES OF THE COMMUNITY.

AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD OF REACHING THE INACTIVE PARENT IS THROUGH THE PRINT MEDIA.

PEOPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN PRESENTLY IN THE SCHOOLS MIGHT BECOME MORE INTERESTED IN THE SCHOOLS IF NEWS OF THEIR GROWN CHILDREN WAS INCREASED IN DISTRICT PUBLICATIONS.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT ATTENDED COLLEGE AND WHO HAVE ANNUAL INCOMES BELOW $25,000 WERE UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THIS SURVEY. THE SAME METHODS DESCRIBED ABOVE, PLUS MORE EFFORTS TO SHOW THE CONNECTION OF THE SCHOOLS AND PROPERTY VALUES MIGHT HELP TO REACH THIS GROUP.

A THIRD AREA OF RECOMMENDATION CONCERNS THE BOARD'S COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY. WE HEARD AND READ MANY GOOD SUGGESTIONS

ON THIS TOPIC. THIS COMMUNICATION AUDIT IS AN EXCELLENT STEP IN THE DIRECTION OF PROVIDING THE BOARD WITH COMMUNITY AND STAFF VIEWS.

THE COMMUNITY IS INTENSELY INTERESTED IN AND PROUD OF ITS SCHOOLS. THEY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT EVERY TOPIC CONCERNING THE SCHOOLS. FROM THE SURVEY RESULTS WE RECOMMEND THAT MORE INFORMATION BE PROVIDED ON CERTAIN TOPICS, PARTICULARLY ON THE HANDICAPPED AND GIFTED PROGRAMS, BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE LACK KNOWLEDGE OF THEM, ON THE EDUCATION OF THE AVERAGE CHILD, ON CURRICULUM, THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD'S PROGRESS, AND TEACHING METHODS.

IF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE TRIED, WE BELIEVE THEY WILL FURTHER IMPROVE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION IN THE NISKAYUNA SCHOOLS, FOR THEY GROW DIRECTLY OUT OF THE DATA AND THE CONCERNS OF THE CITIZENS.